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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that by 2004, the traditional public libraries will have ceased to exist and new, attractive future libraries will have taken their place. The Libraries 2040 project of the Netherlands is initiating seven different libraries of the future. The Brabant library is the "ultimate library of the future" for the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant, and the impetus behind it is that the current public library system is no longer able to cope with the enormous production of books. Hotel Alphabet views the library as a dynamic building that takes the shape of a complete biotope of a large hotel open at all times, pleasantly anonymous and welcoming. The hormone library is designed as an "emotional interface" enabling young people to use the library in ways that respond to their rapidly changing moods. The survival library comprises almost 30 publications by writers from Noord-Brabant, hidden in the town of Oisterwijk and the surrounding countryside. The main aim of the virtual library of the future is to create an environment in which the terms "structure," "chaos," and "collectivity" are given new meaning. Not the books themselves but the experience of reading is the primary focus of the "Bibliotheque d'amis." In the partisan library, hidden in the scenery around Moerdijk, children became the librarians of their own library and only children were told of its whereabouts. (AEF)

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Creating Library Spaces: libraries 2040

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2040 BIBLIOTHEKEN

(Libraries 2040 - The Future in Progress)

Premise

The central focus in the 'libraries 2040' project is on the future of public libraries. In most future projections, the principal question is what expectations there are for the future: the *probable future*. That is the future of extrapolated trends and factual expectations. This project is all about what we ourselves want in a *chosen future*, a future in which our ideals and dreams also have a fair chance.

The premise on which this project is based is that books will live on. Why? Quite simply because we want them to. Just as you walk even though you could take the car, the bus or the tram. Books will be there as long as we go on walking. Books enrich society and will forever remain part of our culture.

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For that reason there will always be room in our civilisation where we can keep books, places of collective inspiration, attractive places that are pleasant to spend time in and where we can meet books.

In future, the people of Noord-Brabant will be finding different ways of spending their free time, reading differently and using different sources to find information. Accordingly, we have framed a concept of the future, a far-reaching, attractive alternative future in which anything is imaginable and everything is feasible. In this concept, libraries are given a future. By 2004, the traditional public libraries will have ceased to exist and new, attractive future libraries will have taken their place. What will they be like? The libraries 2040 project is looking for an answer to this question by initiating seven different libraries of the future. Not by dictating how this should be done, but by giving fantasy and inspiration free rein.

The Brabant library

The Brabant library is the ultimate library of the future for the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant, designed by architect Winy Maas (MVRDV). In just a short space of time, Maas has become one of the Netherlands' most famed architects. Among his work is the design for the VPRO Villa[1] and the much talked-about Dutch Pavilion at the Expo 2000 in Hanover.

The impetus behind this Brabant library is that the current public library system is no longer able to cope with the enormous production of books. In addition, increasing urbanisation and population density have spawned a growing and more differentiated demand for information. In his design, Maas calls for a centralised approach so as to fend off virtual developments and the decline in quality brought about by the product that the current decentralised order provides. He has designed a central library, 'the Brabant library', which also functions as a general resource facility offering a complex and effective distribution package. Operating in this framework, Maas has designed the new Brabant library, a library that redefines and intensifies all existing and new library functions in Noord-Brabant. In this 230 metres high 'metalibrary' there is room for about 5 million books (17 kilometres of bookshelves), thousands of magazines, terminals, reading/studying rooms, (Internet) cafés, a theatre, etc. The Brabant library is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The Brabant library will be located in the municipality of Vught. Maas' design is pioneering and innovative, he presents nothing more or less than an entirely new concept for the construction of libraries.

The backdrop to the Brabant library (1/2)

The enormous production of books is too much for the public library in its present conception to cope with. Increased urbanisation and population density have led to a large and more differentiated demand for books. Who of us is not familiar with the feeling of having read all the books of any interest, disappointed that the source of entertainment, wisdom and knowledge that seemed at first to be endless is after all finite? Public libraries today know no 'completeness' or 'completeness through specialisation', a prerequisite for a library.

There no profundity without completeness or specialisation, putting an end to the appeal and competitive edge vis-à-vis other libraries or other media. Moreover, in a globalising environment, libraries will have to build up international rather than national collections.

In addition to that, attention must be focused on the new media – the immense growth and potential of new information carriers such as CD-ROMs and computers means that 'everything' can be retrieved 'everywhere'. It would seem that downloading and printing out books are to be the death of the library.

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[1] The VPRO is a Dutch broadcasting organisation

Is there any sense therefore in upholding the present concept? Or has the moment come to redirect current and growing collections in the libraries of Noord-Brabant?

Source: search engine of the provincial library centre for Noord-Brabant

The backdrop to the Brabant library (2/2)

All library functions and collections of the province are concentrated and kept in one place, in the Brabant library, thus creating a gigantic and comprehensive library comprising approximately 5 million volumes. With its international appeal, this library is also emphatic when it comes to fulfilling a depository task. Its collections are directly accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, thus guaranteeing completeness and specialisation.

This concentration will open up further possibilities for research – more funds will be available for establishing links between various information clusters, for making analyses, developing reading packages, detecting gaps in information, etc. The Brabant library also provides ample meeting space for making contacts, enabling communication, and so on. The result is a vast community centre, a provincial 'lounge'. The Brabant library is not only a physical public library, though, it is a service facility for all kinds of decentralised branches. It would seem that a central library such as this, combined with a wide, fast and efficient distribution network is ideal because it makes it possible to couple collection building to local service.

Locating small, yet exclusive collections in modern meeting places such as local cafés, dentists' waiting rooms, stations, schools, city halls or petrol stations, can stimulate the demand for books. There you can read, consult, loan or even buy books with your library card. By placing terminals at these sites, other books in the collection can be referred to, read, ordered or even printed out.

Source: search engine of the provincial library centre for Noord-Brabant

The Brabant library concept

Whilst some user prefer a strictly systematic library, others benefit from a library laid out along a promenade of sorts so that they can stroll around. The Brabant library combines both options. System and overall view are achieved by organising everything along strict alphabetical lines: *Alphabet City*. The whole collection is arranged from A to Z in easily and directly accessible bookcases, with new titles under 'N', children and cooking under 'C', the year 1920 under 'T' for time, books on travel under 'T', and so on.

By 'circulating' this gigantic wall of books you get a spiral-shaped building surrounding a communal space, the lounge. The bookcases are arranged at right angles to the walls, forming niches in which, in comparative shelter, you can look up information. In this way, a wall of books is constructed that extends the length of about 17 kilometres right up to Noord-Brabant's highest altitude somewhere around 230 metres above sea level. At specific points in the building the bookshelves fan out, making room for computer areas, reading rooms, auditoriums or suchlike.

Next to traditional lifts and staircases, there will be about 800 glass study booths that move vertically as well as horizontally, on the outside and on the inside. This makes it possible to navigate the whole collection from one's own comfortable, private booth, in whatever way or order one likes. Other target groups can be serviced by furnishing some of the booths as meeting kiosks or mini lounges. A navigation system would prevent collisions.

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Source: search engine of the provincial library centre for Noord-Brabant

Hotel Alphabet

In a previous collaborative venture with the Provincial Library Centre for Noord-Brabant, the strip cartoonist, artist and architect Joost Swarte depicted the classic public library as a hotel lounge, calling it '*Hotel Alphabet*'.

In Swarte's view, the public library is not a static habitat where books stay for the duration, but rather a dynamic building with, literally, a toing-and-froing of books. Spinning that out further, the image takes the shape of a complete biotope of a large hotel (open at all times, pleasantly anonymous and welcoming), where you can eat, do business, sleep, meet, party, mourn, go on blind dates, etc. This hotel is a small and integral city in its own right.

This image is reflected in the Van der Valk hotel in Vught, a hotel in the old Brabant tradition, open 24 hours a day and easy to walk into, with an open fireplace, good chairs and books at the end of the hotel lounge. What more obvious step than to ask Joost Swarte to set up his library (*Hotel Alphabet*) in this Van der Valk hotel?

The spines of the books are important in the Hotel Alphabet – the books are in bookcases, themselves made in the shape of books, one next to the other, in the spine as it were. Readers can take out and replace the books themselves, helped by unique pictograms, likewise designed by Joost Swarte.

A limited select edition of these design bookcases will be available for sale to interested libraries or private individuals. Hotel Alphabet is the product of a collaborative venture with the Vught public library.

The hormone library

This library was realised by a group of teenage youngsters from Oss, called Osse Pubers, in a collaborative venture between the Oss public library, de Muzelinck in Oss and the Arts & Crafts College in Eindhoven. A text by the author Herman Brusselmans was the inspiration for the hormone library:

"Are the nineties any different to the sixties or seventies or the years before that? Will the years after 2000 be different again? Are the young younger in different ways than they used to be? I have my doubts about that. OK, there were no computers in my day, no mobile phones, no Aids risk. Statistics say that there were less suicides in our day, we didn't take weapons to school, we didn't pop XTC pills, and didn't dance to 280 electronic beats per nanosecond. It wasn't drummed into us what a millennium bug was, or the euro or the Axion Proton card, no Internet access, no chat room chums, no 167 TV channels, no psychological counselling if we'd failed our geography test and then threatened the teacher with a knife or a lawsuit during the day or harassed him with 'that's the end of you'-e-mail-threats at night. Maybe we had fewer friends, parents that weren't as flashy, grandparents who had never been skiing, and no gel in our hair that was definitely not tested on animals.

But we were the same dopes as those who came after us, and young in the same way as those who are young today, and who are young in the same way as the young will be in fifty years time. We were spawned by a mother and a father and doomed to live. We were small, we grew up, we were young and one day we were no longer young, however old we were. We were, I think, people."

The library represents the unchanging view adolescents have of their environment in 2040, the most fundamental elements of which still are recklessness, insecurity, loneliness and curiosity. This library is

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designed as an 'emotional interface' enabling youngsters to use the library in ways that respond to their rapidly changing moods.

The survival library

Excitement and adventure. Two essential ingredients in Sherlock Holmes books, evenings playing games or during a survival expedition, to mention just a few extremes. For those who enjoy solving mysteries or riddles, this is certainly not a game to miss out on. Search for the mini book chests hidden in the woods and marshes in Oisterwijk, the Kampina nature reserve and countless buildings around town. This is about the most adventurous and relaxing library you could imagine! Book chest hunts are fun for all ages.

Fitted out with the cryptic directions given in the 'hunt' booklet and other indispensable attributes such as a map, a compass and a keen nose, these book chests can be ferreted out. It is wise to use the walking and cycling map 'Oisterwijkse Woods and Marshes, Kampina', for sale in the Oisterwijk visitors centre, the tourist information office and the ANWB, the Dutch AA.

The survival library comprises almost thirty publications by writers from Noord-Brabant, hidden in the town of Oisterwijk and the surrounding countryside. These publications can be found by solving the cryptograms and with a unique matching stamp, library users can keep their own 'hunt' books up to date. This library – the smallest in Noord-Brabant in terms of numbers of books but the largest when it comes to surface area – is a joint undertaking of the Association for the Protection of Natural Monuments, the Noord-Brabant Society and the Oisterwijk public library.

The virtual library of the future

You don't seem to get that same reading experience from a digitised book as you do from the actual book. The feeling that you're 'reducing speed' when you read a book just cannot stand up to the competition from the ever increasing speed of consumption of the visually oriented, virtual world. Where can these worlds meet? What experiences does the virtual library have to offer in exchange? Up to now, technological possibilities, functionality and ease of reference are at the forefront of most digital library concepts.

As such, technology is not the keynote of this library, the main aim is to create an environment in which the terms 'structure', 'chaos' and 'collectivity' are given new meaning. A text written by the Italian author Italo Calvino was the focal point for the design: *'It's not true that I can't remember anything; the memories are still there, hidden in the grey tangles of my brain, in the moist sandbanks deposited on the riverbed of my thoughts.'*

If we want to recall a memory, we circle around an area of memory, guided by association and emotion. Together, we give the world a collective memory with our topical associations on the surface and deep down, dormant, the traces of the old Greeks as well. In so doing, the virtual library takes on the values of the classical library: we are the best archive of our time. In this concept the virtual library organises our memory, presenting it as a fractal spiral.

The virtual library of the future is a design by MarcelWoutersOntwerpers, a firm from Eindhoven that won recognition by developing intriguing and progressive exhibition concepts.

The Bibliothèque d'amis

Not the books themselves but the experience of reading is the primary focus of this library. It is in people's own living room and can be entered only by courtesy of the host or hostess. As a Bibliothèque d'amis, the public library becomes a network of all kinds of home libraries, where we encounter one another in the intimate surroundings of a club, enjoying a good book, a good conversation and a good glass of wine.

For one evening, a few Brabant people – some famous, some not – opened up their own libraries and studies, inviting people in for a good conversation about books, sometimes in the company of a writer/poet/storyteller from Noord-Brabant, if they so choose. Naturally, they decided themselves who to invite, but a few (well-screened) onlookers were also welcome.

Each Bibliothèque d'amis selected two or three books that were thought necessary to add to the library of 2040. These books have in fact been purchased and will be included in the 2040 library. Should this Bibliothèque d'amis continue for another 40 years, it will be a unique collection of about 1000 'timeless' books. This part of the project came about in association with LiBra, the Literair Informatiepunt Brabant (Information group about literature in Noord-Brabant).

The partisan library

Eight children spent four days on a campsite on the grounds of the Fort de Hel ('Hell' fortress) near Willemstad. They came as partisans, from an underground 'Resistance' organisation, searching for freedom, friendship and adventure. They wanted to design a library for the future. Of this future it is said that it is a time where you can read everything and there are no longer any forbidden books. So in that library the lure of the forbidden will be replaced by the excitement of the hidden.

That is why Zo & Zo (So & So) took along the book *'Het verboden boek' (The Forbidden Book)* by Bert Kouwenberg. Why? Because of its title and the landscape in the book: *de stad aan de zee (the town on the seaside)*. The landscape is similar to the landscape around Willemstad, but also the area in the immediate vicinity of Fort de Hel. The book is about freedom, friendship, resistance and hope and it's exciting into the bargain. This is how the adventure began – a mixture of enticing reading and fragments from 'Het verboden boek' played out by children in the landscape around the fortress. This was followed by a 'wild' adventure trip in the Biesbosch, a marshland area, and a discovery and invention day in the world of science and technology. Each day was given its own name, the day of 'the train of thought', the day 'against the grain', the day of 'brain-twisters and inventions', and the day of 'hope'.

The children wrote descriptions of these days in small red books and designed and constructed their library. This library was hidden in the scenery around Moerdijk. The children became the librarians of their own library and only children were told of its whereabouts. It was only after a week that adults were allowed to know where the library was!

The partisan library came about in association with ZO & ZO, museums of & for children and the Moerdijk public library.

What projects does *Libraries 2040* have in store for the future?

Book

In Januari 2002 Biblion in The Hague published a book on the project as a whole with unique photo and film material.
(ISBN 90 5483 297 5)

Near future

There is to be a national sequel to the Libraries 2040 project. In the course of 2002, the NBLC (Netherlands Association of Public Libraries), will be initiating new and original activities as part of this project:

- The library of 100 languages
- The library as a travel agency
- The digital library for children

Information

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